INTRODUCING STUDENTS TO THE ENGLISH MAJOR AND THE UNIVERSITY

The Problem: Retention of students generally "and" retention of students within the English major. Because of the way our department structures its requirements, faculty will not see most English majors in English classes (non-First Year Writing) until the sophomore year. First Year English majors may not feel connected to their major and department, which can negatively impact retention.

Our Initiative: To introduce students to the major earlier, using a variety of techniques and resources, both at the department and college level.

Our process:
1. Gear the first-year seminar to introducing students to the major as well as the university as a whole.
2. Link the First Year Seminar to advising efforts.
3. Have First Year Seminar instructors also serve as First Year Advisors.
4. Have events geared directly for first-year students.
5. Invite first-year students to participate in the intellectual life of the department as a whole.

First Year Seminar for Majors
- It's a required course that all first-year students in our college take, but our course (as well as many others) is also used to acclimate students to the major.
- The course is devoted to introducing first-year college students to the English major and the university.
- Instructors invite guest speakers – other faculty from different areas of the department – to talk to students.
- Writing and research assignments ask students to find out more about the University and the department, and about ways to get involved on campus.

EVENTS
- The department sponsors a few events aimed specifically for first-year students, such as pizza socials and a board game session.
- It also attaches first-year events to other department events such as theater performances and readings, as well as our open advising session (that supplement individual sessions for first-year students).
- First-year seminar teachers also reach out to students for all department events.
- We have department T-shirts that we give out at events; students get excited about them, and the T-shirts give them a sense of belonging to a group.

First Year and Advising Events take the mystique out of talking to faculty outside of the classroom and allow students to see faculty as an essential resource that will contribute to their academic success. If students are comfortable asking questions and knowing where to turn if they get into trouble academically, they are more likely to succeed.

Application and Extensions

Coordinating frequent, casual opportunities to have students meet with faculty provides students with a better understanding of their requirements and the consequences for not scheduling advising appointments to stay on track.

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We could possibly extend the success of our first year students by planning programming for them at the sophomore year where they are making the transition from freshmen advisor to sophomore advisor. Bridging that gap will help the students feel just as comfortable in seeking out help from faculty or other resources on campus.

It does not take much money or time for any academic department to provide events for their first year students. By offering frequent opportunities for students to engage with faculty in a supportive, connected academic community, students will better understand how their studies relate to the real world of work in their chosen field. Faculty can share their experiences or offer programming which demonstrates concrete examples of success in the field of English.